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ABSTRACT

A project was designed to achieve the following objectives: (1) to give early childhood teacher education students an opportunity to become familiar with the use of skill-building interactive games and materials, work with primary age children and observe their general abilities, and observe and evaluate a demonstration lesson; (2) to help children develop a variety of mathematics and language skills and develop positive self-esteem as they serve as the "experts" by teaching college students how to use a variety of language arts and mathematics materials; and (3) to support primary teachers by providing both professional development opportunities and teaching assistance for their classrooms. During the project, a graduate assistant visited a first grade classroom to introduce a variety of interactive games and materials to the children. At the end of the 6-week period, the children and their teacher met with an education methods class in which the children taught the college students how to use the materials. Reactions and observations of the college students and the children are reported. A summary of observational data collected during the demonstration lesson, and two survey instruments are attached. (JD)

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Reverse Practicum: Children as Teachers in the College Classroom

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When Mrs. Butler's class came, I saw the excitement in their eyes. They were eager to play the games and show others how to play them. When working with the students, I saw their skills being reinforced. If they messed up, the person working with them would correct them. It was neat to see a student who messed up open his eyes and say "Oh yeah, I see!!" It was like seeing them think and fit pieces together.

"Playing" is much more fun than watching. . . The children really seemed interested in the games. This is a very different situation than when I substituted this spring break and had to do addition on the board in a boring lesson and then a worksheet.

Quotes from Early Childhood
Teacher Education Students

Acknowledgements

The Early Childhood Education Graduate Assistants participating in this project were Kathy Lynch (Spring 1989) and Judy Kelliher (Fall 1989). The participating classroom was the first-grade of Judy Butler, John Wayland Elementary School, Rockingham County Schools, Bridgewater, VA. The successful implementation of this project was largely due to their cooperation and support. Their enthusiasm, time, and effort are much appreciated. Grateful acknowledgement is also given to Ed Byrd and Ed Price, participating principals, and, of course to the first-grade children in Mrs. Butler's classroom and the Early Childhood Education students at James Madison University.

Background Information

This project grew from the desire to find an effective way to help teacher education students relate theory to practice and to relate what they hear in college coursework to what they will be able to do as classroom teachers. The Early Childhood Education Program at James Madison University stresses how learning occurs through the construction of knowledge. Methods which allow young children to be actively involved in constructing knowledge are promoted. The degree to which students are able to observe such teaching methods in area classrooms is somewhat limited. One manageable solution seemed to be to support at least one teacher's development of such activities and then provide a way for all of our students to be exposed to the classroom's activities. As the project developed, the additional possibilities for learning and the benefits to all participants became clear.

Goals

1. The project is designed to give teacher education students an opportunity to: (a) become familiar with the use of interactive games and materials to help children construct knowledge and develop a variety of skills, (b) work with children and observe the general abilities of primary age children, and (c) observe and evaluate a demonstration lesson.

2. The project is designed to help children: (a) develop a variety of mathematics and language arts skills, and (b) develop positive self-esteem as they serve as the "experts" by teaching college students how to use a variety of language arts and mathematics materials.

3. The project is designed to support primary teachers by: (a) providing professional development opportunities including awareness of a variety of teaching materials, observation of the children's interaction with the materials, and an opportunity to share their expertise and experience with pre-service teachers, and (b) providing teaching assistance for their classrooms.

Participants

The participating first-grade classroom was selected based on the teacher's desire to expand her use of materials which actively involve children in learning, her willingness to work with pre-service teachers, and her positive working relationship with the university professor. Teacher education practicum students had been placed in the teacher's classroom for the last two years. There were 22 children in the class in Spring 1989 and 19 children in the class in the Fall 1989. All children were six or seven years old.

The graduate assistants involved in the project (one each semester) were students in the masters program in Early Childhood Education at James Madison University. Neither student had an undergraduate degree in education or any formal teaching experience.

The undergraduate students in the project were juniors and seniors in the Early Childhood Education program at James Madison University working toward NK - 4 certification. They participated in this experience in the semester just prior to student teaching.

Materials

Most of the materials used were provided by the Early Childhood professor and included such activities as board games, card games, self-checking materials, problem-solving tools, and computer programs. These materials were designed to support children's development of a variety of skills and concepts in language arts and mathematics such as beginning letter sounds, word and numeral recognition, counting, addition, and measurement. The materials may be used by children individually or in small groups.

Procedure

This project first took place in the Spring 1989 semester from mid-January through mid-March. During this time a graduate assistant visited a first grade classroom to introduce a variety of interactive games and materials to the children. At the end of the six week period, the children and their teacher took a field trip to the college campus where they met with an education methods class and the children taught the college students how to use the materials. The project was repeated in the Fall of 1989 when it was expanded to include additional materials.

At the beginning of each semester, the graduate assistant met with the early childhood professor to familiarize herself with the materials and how they could be used. They also decided if their were other materials that needed to be added and made plans for construction of those materials.

The graduate assistant visited the first-grade classroom twice a week during the six week period to introduce the materials to the children. She worked with rotating groups of children for approximately an hour on each visit. The session took place in a room separate from the regular clasroom. In addition to the children's exposure to the materials during these sessions, the classroom teacher made the materials available to children at other times during the project weeks as she deemed appropriate.

At the end of six weeks, the children and classroom teacher took a field trip to the JMU campus where the children visited an early childhood education methods class. The children worked with the college students in small groups for approximately one hour during which the children taught the students how to play the games and use the materials. The methods students were encouraged to observe

children's behavior and abilities as well as learn about the materials. At the end of the game playing session, the classroom teacher met with the methods students to present her perspective on the materials and answer questions.

During the field trip, the early childhood professor also taught a large group demonstration lesson to the children. During the lesson, each college student observed and collected data on a particular aspect of the lesson such as children's correct and incorrect responses, types of questions asked, how the instructor made personal contact with the students, on task-off task behavior, frequency and types of praise, etc. The data the students collected was handed in at the end of the session and later collated and presented as the basis for a discussion on classroom management. (See attached Summary of Observational Data.)

Evaluation Procedures

After the completion of the project, perspectives of the graduate students and the classroom teacher were investigated through an open-ended questionaire. The undergraduate students completed a questionaire in which they responded to both open-ended questions and rated statements using a Likert Scale. The graduate assistant interviewed the children individually the week following the field trip. Children responded to structured interview questions with a selection of multiple choice responses and an opportunity for open-ended comment.

Evaluation

There is no doubt that the goals of the project listed on page two were all met to at least some degree. Responses from the Early Childhood Education graduate and undergraduate students, the classroom teacher, and the children were all extremely positive.

The teacher education students did observe children using a variety of materials designed to help the children construct knowledge. Students' perceptions of the value of this experience were, in short, that they learned a great deal. They clearly indicated in their responses to both open-ended and rated questions that observing and interacting with the children contributed greatly to their understanding of the effectiveness of these materials. Students also rated very highly the opportunity to talk with the classroom teacher and viewing the demonstration lesson. (See the attached Summary of Undergradate Responses.)

Both graduate students who participated in the project described their experience as extremely valuable. A quote from one of the graduate student's responses on the evaluation form is written below:

> The majority of what I learned had to do with reinforcing the theories I'm learning in my classes by implementing them in a live setting with children. I saw that (a) using devices like games increases motivation and improves attitudes (for children and teachers), (b) children can be taught concepts and concepts can be reinforced through the effective use of teacher-made games, (c) children do indeed manipulate materials in certain ways, (d) games can be an effective way to evaluate a child's progress and to identify gaps in learning. As a result of this experience, I am far less intimidated by the idea of constructing games and much more likely to implement this method of teaching when I eventually have my own classroom.

The children were given increased opportunity to develop language arts and math skills and communicated very positive evaluations of their experience in the project. They said they enjoyed playing the games and teaching them to the college students. (See Summary of Children's Evaluation attached.) The children also agreed that the games were helping them to learn although it was a little more difficult for them to express exactly what it was they learned. (Nine of 21 children were able to articulate something specific that they thought they had learned through the games).

Finally, the classroom teacher described the project as beneficial to both her children and herself. Besides describing how the games reinforced academic skills the children were learning, she noted the benefits of social interaction that occurred as children played the games. She wrote the following:

> The social interaction between the children as they played the games together was a very beneficial part of the project. The children developed language skills, learned to cooperate, share, and help each other. They learned to negotiate, problem solve, and, best of all, learned to think of others as they had to think how "to best teach" the games to another person.

The classroom teacher also described the project as having a positive influence on her teaching:

Because of this project, I am using more game-type activities in my program as well as more manipulatives in teaching math. I am also trying to allow my children to "discover" and re-invent math, rather than always teaching by example, worksheets, and chalkboard lectures. I am also using the idea of small groups working together on activities, which was so successful in this project.

Evaluations of future phases of the project will be further refined so that strengths and weaknesses are more clearly delineated. However, even at this phase of development, it seems clear this approach holds promise in providing effective educational experiences for teacher education students, children, and elementary teachers.

Summary of Observational Data Collected
during the Demonstration Lesson

Lesson topic: Tangrams Length of lesson: 25 minutes

Cues/Communication Modes

A. Frequency of signal type (in minutes):

visual = 12, auditory = 22, other = 5

B. Teacher's eye contact:

at board = 22, at individual children = 42,
scanning all children = 20, other = 2

C. Types of nonverbal communication:

at child's level (sat down, lean forward, kneel), smiles, nods head, hand gestures (e.g., pats child, points to board), relaxed body position, turned toward child

D. Types of individual contact:

eye contact, asks questions of individual children, hand motions toward individual children, putting hand on individual children's shoulders, smiling, head nods, greeting children at bus, holding hand, use of 'wait time', "thank yous"

E. Teacher remarks to direct child behavior:

positive language (telling what to do) = 3
"Sit so you can look and see me"
"Count to yourself while I put these up."
"You need to sit one more minute and then I'll tell you what we'll do next."

negative language (what not to do) = 0

Questions and Answers

A. Frequency of question type:

open = 8, closed (only one correct answer) = 5, opinion = 1, other = 0

B. Children (N = 16) who were asked questions :

Jacob = 2, Adam = 1, Sean = 2, Tonya = 1, Arin = 4, Natasha = 2,
Amanda = 4, Jeanette = 3, Julia = 5, all others = 0

C. Children's correct answers: total = 15

For example:
Q: What could I have in this bag?
A: paper, pencils, erasers, games

Q: Tell me about the shapes.
A: There are seven. There are the most triangles.
There is one square and one diamond.
There are less squares and diamonds than triangles.

D. Children's incorrect answers: total = 3

For example:

Q: Is there a way to make a third big mountain?
A: The girl made a small triangle.

E. Teacher's responses to correct answers:

repeats answer = 7, follow-up question = 4,
acceptance (OK, thank you) = 3, praise thinking = 2,
general praise = 4, explanation = 1, specific praise = 1

F. Teacher's responses to incorrect answers:

follow-up question = 1, encouragement = 1

Frequency of Encouragement and Praise

A. Students praised:

Individual girl = 10, individual boy = 6, whole class = 7

B. Types of praise:

general = 8, specific = 2, other = 0

C. Types of responses praised:

correct answer = 9, wrong answer = 3, effort = 11,
appropriate behavior = 2, thinking = 17

On-task, off-task behavior

A. Types of off-task behavior:

looking around, fidgeting

B. Number of children off-task:

12:23	0	12:26	1	12:29	0	12:32	4
12:35	3	12:38	1	12:41	3	12:45	1

Summary of Undergraduates' Responses
Reverse Practicum Evaluation

Number of respondents: 23

The most valuable aspect of the workshop was:

- working with the children: 11
- observing the children use the games: 4
- obtaining game ideas: 8

Something I learned from the workshop was:

-extent of children's abilities: 2
-many concepts can be taught and reinforced through games: 6
-variety of games: 3
-other: importance of games, ideas for utilization of games, identifying a child's cognitive level through observation of game playing, feasibility of making games

A suggestion for change I have is:

have college students make a game to introduce, more time to play games, less time to play games, have different game tables and rotate, shorter follow-up, more time to talk with teacher

Please indicate whether you strongly disagree, disagree, have no opinion, agree, or strongly agree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate number below.

	strongly disagree	disagree	no opinion	agree	strongly agree
1. It was helpful to see the introduction of a new material to children in the opening lesson.	0	0	3	11	9
2. The opening lesson was typical of other lessons I have seen in my practicum experiences.	3	5	6	9	0
3. I learned a great deal by watching the children actually play the games.	1	2	3	10	7
4. It would have been just as valuable to review the games and learn to play them with other college students.	6	11	4	2	0

	strongly disagree	disagree	no opinion	agree	strongly agree
5. The children's ability levels in playing the games were more advanced than I thought they would be.	1	4	4	11	3
6. The children's ability levels in playing the games were less advanced than I thought they would be.	3	10	4	4	0
7. The children were able to clearly explain the games.	2	5	2	14	0
8. I was able to see most of the games that were available during the workshop with the children.	1	6	1	15	0
9. The degree to which I view such materials and games as valuable learning experiences for children increased as a result of the workshop.	0	4	2	15	2
10. The degree to which I believe it is practical to use such materials and games in the classroom increased as a result of the workshop.	0	3	5	10	5
11. It was important to have time after the children left to talk with their teacher.	0	1	4	11	6
12. The classroom teacher clarifed ideas for me about using math materials in the classroom.	0	2	6	11	3
13. It was important to have time after the children left to spend additional time exploring/reviewing the games.	0	0	4	13	4
14. I would recommend having such a workshop in future semesters.	1	1	3	11	7

Summary of Children's Responses
Reverse Practicum Evaluation

Number of respondents: 21

Circle one answer for each question for numbers 1 - 7.

1. How much do you like playing the math games?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
19	2	0	0

2. How much did you like learning and practicing the math games with Mrs. Lynch and in the cafeteria?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
17	3	1	0

3. How much do you think playing the games helped you to practice doing math?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
19	1	0	1

4. How much do you think playing the games helped you to learn new things?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
19	1	1	0

5. How much did you like taking the field trip to JMU?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
17	3	0	0

6. How much did you like teaching the games to the college students?

a lot	a little	not very much	not at all
15	4	1	1

7. How often would you like to be able to play with the math games in you classroom?

every day	two times a week	once a week	never
15	5	1	0

One thing I practiced or learned about when I played the games was

I don't know: 11
Other: money (2), telling time (1), adding and subtracting (2), how to play games (1), the Bears game (2), how to tell a 6 from a 9 (1)